

UNDERSTANDING PSYCHOLOGICAL MARGINALITIES IN LITERATURE: A STEP TOWARDS HARMONIOUS SOCIETIES

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ABSTRACT

Therapeutic Literary Novels: A Step Back from Mental Agony

Psychological fiction offers a unique kind of therapy to its readers. Proposed paper intends to reflect upon few exemplary characters from English literature around the world. This particular genre of writing tries to delve into circumstances that force characters to behave in an abnormal manner. Internal observation is stressed upon in order to understand the character; motivation behind actions is more important than the actions of psychological characters. Society, at large, talks about taking care of sick. In reality, mentally disturbed people are considered to be outcasts. Enough time is not given by family and friends to get normalcy back into the life of such people. Literature is valued for bringing out all that troubles man in a lighter tone through stream of consciousness writing style, interior dialogues and monologues and other literary devices. Troubled youth of present age easily identifies with these characters. Catharsis helps to cleanse minds of troubled readers. When a reader identifies himself with certain traits found in characters from these stories, it gives him a sense of being part of their world; his sense of alienation is replaced by feelings that make him want to reach out to the character to console and to be consoled. Reader finds a purpose to his meaningless existence. Readers having to deal with the sick in their lives also learn to live a better life through all that touches upon the lives of characters, who have a mental case amidst them.

KEYWORDS: *Monologues, Interior Dialogues, Catharsis, Psychological Characters, Stream of Consciousness & Mental Marginalities*

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INTRODUCTION

This paper delves into contemporary issue of psychological disorder and some of the reasons that effect mental health. Examples from literary texts shed light on all that ails the characters. Solutions to most of the problems are to be found with behaviour of human beings. Sympathetic and empathetic humanity can do a lot in resolving such problems.

CONTENTS

Understanding Psychological Marginalities in Literature: A step towards Harmonious Societies

It is true that books are a man's best friend. Those who prefer to stay away from the main stream of life, find book reading a relaxing affair. Isolation is often not the first choice of a literate person. A person is forced to accept this lifestyle. Undue pressure at home, psychological torture at work place, and demands of society at large are just to name few problems that ails man's mind and makes life unbearable to great extent. World of fiction does not allow him to be deprived of pleasures of ordinary or imaginary life. Literature for this very quality continues to reign over world societies since ancient times.

Writers write books with their inner creativity. Stories and characters are born out of imagination that is influenced by age in which the writer lives along with people and circumstances that surround him. Most war fictions come with autobiographical elements. Russian novelists and writings of Indian writers from different parts of the Sub-Continent and other English translations from around the world shed light upon inner turmoil of mankind that is trying to survive amidst cultured barbarians.

Somebody remarked, "A great novel not only enhances our understanding – more crucially, it understands us." More about human nature can be learnt from literary writings. Hidden parts of consciousness get exposed during writing process. Autobiographical novels come with experience of writers; wealth of understanding and knowledge is weaved through the narrative that has life-sized characters with complex human emotions; life does not come in black or white, it comes with different shades and hues that evolve out of different colours. Readers identify with these characters to find solutions to problems that do not allow them to lead normal lives.

Not only individuals, but hospitals and psychologists working in privacy of their homes have started using group reading exercise as a therapy for their disturbed patients. Sigmund Freud used to talk to his patients in order to make them throw out all that troubled them from their sub-conscious mind through excessive talking. This effective exercise relieved the patient from pent up emotions. Group discussion therapy was also discussed in detail by Ken Kesey in his novel, 'One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest'. Nurse Ratched makes the patients speak out their fears and deeds that had made them land up in the mental asylum where she happened to work. Group reading helps people belonging to different communities come together with their different cultural backgrounds, understanding, view points and varied experiences. Minds work together to glean and impart knowledge. People are better able to deal with their grief when they identify their own troubles, as shared by the characters in the book. Though solution is given by the writer, real time and real people lend a helping hand; living individuals, who come with humane values, self-confidence and self-respect, tend to act as self-esteem booster for the troubled person.

Isolated and self-isolated people who have been rejected by society, and alienated individuals are more prone to depression. But according to Holden Caulden, depression can be kept at bay. He remarks, "What really knocks me out is a book that, when you are all done reading it, you wish the author that wrote it was a terrific friend of yours and you could call him up on the phone whenever you felt like it." Well-written narratives allow readers to escape from mundane and pressing physical world. Books can certainly be termed as a man's best friend.

Mental illness is better understood in modern times than it was done earlier. Not all mental problems require high doses of medication. Psychological problems can be dealt with love, care, patience, understanding and appropriate solution to patient's needs. Though these words seem good on paper, it is a difficult task to find qualities of a dedicated and caring caretaker in this fast-paced lifestyle where people are too engrossed in their own selves. William Faulkner wrote about a retarded character, Benjy, in his **Stream of Consciousness** novel, 'The Sound and the Fury'. A black servant takes care of Benjy and love of sister keeps the character in a happy mood. Benjy lives in a world of his own and is simple in nature; in contrast, other family members have lot of **psychological** problems. Sane people do not seem to adjust to life that they lead. The mother of four children, Mrs. Compson is too self-absorbed to give affection to her neurotic son Quentin, mentally retarded Benjy, mean-spirited Jason and stubborn daughter Caddy. She can be compared to modern women who are too preoccupied in finding 'identity' of their own in the outside world or are too selfish in pursuing pleasures offered by life than to care for those who depend upon them. Father is shown as an alcoholic. **Alcoholists** find it easier to escape

duties that are demanding and require contribution from man in making home a happy and blessed place. Quentin is totally shattered emotionally when he finds out about promiscuous behaviour of his sister. This is because he believes in certain norms that should be adhered to while living in a civilized world. Old-fashioned well-read brother of Caddy is an example of those who acquire knowledge but are inept in using it at the right place and at right time. Though considered to be a wise person, Quentin reveals that something is wrong with him when he tries to save the honour of his sister by telling his father that he (Quentin) is responsible for making his sister pregnant. In doing so, he not only raises a question mark on his upbringing, but also blackens the name of the family. Who will consider a family to be respectable where a sister has been raped by her own brother? Readers have a wide choice of characters to identify with in this emotional story of a deteriorating family. Social, political and economic marginality is responsible for the state of this family that has steadily been on the decline since Civil War that affected Southern Aristocrats around Mississippi. Wars play a vital role in shaping destinies of nations and men who have nothing to do with wars. Matriarchal servant stands for marginality in social order that considered blacks as an inferior race. Literary writings by black community have a lot to talk about on this issue. The paper however emphasizes upon different mental make-up of people, who are undergoing similar problems. Quentin finds life unbearable and he commits suicide. Caddy runs away from home, and Jason becomes more selfish. Ray of hope for humanity is seen at the end of the novel; Dilsey prays for the family. The black servant seems to be the only sane person around a troubled household.

The paper does not talk about regional literature; it focuses upon issues that concern humanity at large. Fictions talk about true stories and real people; but all this is done with dexterity by expert narrators. The true character of fictitious story manages to escape jeering and sniggering that often goes on among acquaintances and family members. He manages to escape the cold society that has no sympathy for him. Writer carves out a new and comfortable niche for him in this world. Writer writing on behalf of disturbed true life person, not only provides tool for healing through the process of catharsis to this person, but is also able to rid himself of anger that he feels towards those who cause suffering to others.

Unlike Benjy of Faulkner's novel, Septimus Warren Smith of Virginia Woolf's 'Mrs. Dalloway' is a victim of shell shock. Reading about such characters help war veterans and their family members about possible problems that they might have to face after the return of the war veterans from active front. It allows them to prepare in advance for therapeutic sessions for all involved; i.e., the family and the shell shock victim. Today, the Defence Department of countries across the world is lending out a helping hand to soldiers who have been under tremendous stress. Group discussions are held where high-ranking officials talk about their experiences. Battle fatigue or PTSD made Septimus hate this beautiful world enough to commit suicide. Early English Literature talks about gallant knights. Arthurian tales can be read to get glimpses into what a real knight should be like. These knights did not suffer from Battle fatigue because they fought to save the honour of someone or something of great importance. Physical battle allowed them to match their strength against the enemy. Here, there was no guilt involved as true warriors saved damsels in distress and managed to break spells cast by demons. They celebrated merrily on coming back and were rewarded for their meritorious deeds. Modern soldier often returns home with a sense of guilt. Sense of victory is empty in their case as many innocents have been killed during the war. Guilt at times is there because they had been unable to save others from succumbing to enemy bullets. Though it is not their fault that people died in front of them, still they seem to take it as a personal failure. Inhuman warfare of modern times does not agree with mental set-up of man. Earlier man fought for a reason and home front was spared of great consequences; today a soldier just goes to the front because he is on the payroll or under misguidance of his psychological mindset that makes him think he is serving his motherland while all this while he is acting like a pawn-

soldier in a game of chess being played by bureaucrats and men with name, fame and undue power. Homer's 'The Iliad' along with 'The Odyssey', has become therapeutic literary text for US veterans who are in need of post-traumatic stress therapy. Odysseus suffered from PTSD as he was insensitive to his distressed wife, moved around with blank face, felt uncomfortable among crowds and mistrust that could be found all around him. War veterans enrol in University of Vermont to avail of facility that can bring them back to normalcy through informative classes. Bryan Doerries has come out with a book, 'The Theater of War - What Ancient Greek Tragedies Can Teach Us Today'. The book is helping thousands in re-living horrors of war in order to get back stability of mind. Survivors returning from Nazi Camps had horrors to narrate. After watching movies based on these so-called war-shelters, one certainly relishes the life one is leading irrespective of mundane problems faced during day-to-day life.

Lord Byron remarked, "We of the craft are all crazy. Some are affected by gaiety, others by melancholy, but all are more or less touched." This seems to hint at creativity going hand in hand with mental illness. Novelists, playwrights, biographers and artistic people are supposed to have bipolar disorder. Aristotelian tradition too believes that extraordinary achievement has melancholy for its companion. If one goes by this theory, then it is to be concluded that people having mental illness and writers who come out with extraordinary words share similar way of viewing things. Writers have tremendous pressure on their minds as they have duties to fulfil, duty to their own self, to their readers and to societies at large. Moreover, creative minds like those of literary writers are highly sensitive to all that goes around, be it positive or negative in nature. Activities of the mind are more taxing than any other exercise and thereby to find a writer suffering from this should not come as a surprise. It was probably mood disorder that made writers like Earnest Hemingway, Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath take their own lives. Woolf had mental breakdown; first when her mother died and second when her father died. She is also believed to have been sexually traumatized by her step-brother and a cousin. Woolf loved her parents and missed them. Even though she had a loving and caring life partner, the harm had already done its work. She wrote that her mind could not take any more pressure. She drowned herself and made sure that she did not escape her end by filling her pockets with stones that would weigh her body and would not make it come to water surface. This was action of an intelligent mind that had enough of this world. Sylvia Plath too took her own life by choosing a horrific death. She choked herself to death with the help of heated oven kept in her kitchen. But before killing herself, she ensured that her sleeping children slept peacefully. She blocked the gap present in their bedroom door with a piece of cloth in order to keep away fumes of overheated oven from entering their bedroom. She too missed her loving father after his death. Even religion could not take away pain and loneliness felt by her. One cannot say that she suffered from Electra Complex. Like most little girls, her father was her ideal person; person whom even death could not touch. He was her anchor and with the anchor gone, the ship was left unmanned on the dangerous and endless water expanse. Pinsky states that Plath "suffered the airless egocentrism of one in love with an ideal self." According to Donoghue, "she showed what self-absorption makes possible in art, and the price that must be paid for it, in the art, as clearly as in death." Viewpoints can be many but the truth is that both these female writers could not cope up with their troubled 'mind'. Medical aid with proper timely administration can save lives; only loving people around such people can make life meaningful and lovable once again.

People like Key Redfield Jamison studied mood-disorders in great detail. The study reveals that creative professions give out dangerous signals of unipolar depression, schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. Substance abuse also fuels writing ability as imagination soars along with it. 'On the Road' was written by Jack Kerouac, an American and French-Canadian. The novel talks about free life, a life that leads to nowhere. Jack Kerouac died young because of free-living lifestyle. His was a complex personality. His thematic and spontaneous writings touched upon spirituality,

promiscuity, poverty, jazz, Buddhism, travel and drugs. Autobiographies of such novelists make readers aware of problems that assail creative minds and once again warn them against negligence shown towards disruptive mental signals. Jack was only four when he came face-to-face with the loss of a loved one. His elder brother, Gerard, died. Jack wrote about his dead brother's presence by his side in his novel 'Visions of Gerard'. The novel explores highly mind taxing topics like existence in this world, its reality and illusion. Kerouac's 'Desolation Angels' comes with disenchantment of the writer with Buddhist philosophy. Once again mantle of life-sustaining force of religion is shrugged off by the writer. As diagnosed by a doctor of Merchant Marine, his was "schizoid personality". His writings mirror his sensitive thoughts. "The Sea is My Brother" talks about all that Jack disliked. He talks about inequalities and frustrations that drive man towards self-inflicted agonies that a man undergoing psychological pain inflicts upon himself in order to relieve himself from unbearable agony. While near his end, Jack Kerouac wrote in a state of frenzy. He even tore papers into strips to create a roll for his typewriter that would facilitate his uninterrupted flow of spontaneous writing. This kind of writing did not allow for selection and discarding of thoughts that were not required to suit some purpose. This was what Stream of Consciousness writing style is all about.

Ancient writers knew that a strong link existed between psychological well-being and good health. Plato in his dialogue, the 'Charmides', speaks about healthy soul that had power to cure physical diseases. Socrates tells Charmides that beautiful words can cure a soul, "He stated the soul was treated with certain charms, my dear Charmides, and that these charms were beautiful words." Though marginalization makes one opinion stronger than the other, it all depends upon what the writer is targeting at. While Plato considers virtue essential for mental health, this itself in turn requires good physical health. Aristotle associates good health with "human flourishing". By human flourishing, he means that a man should be able to live a life that would give him the capability to reason and to further develop this reasoning ability in a rational manner. Both the philosophers aim at same kind of living, only the way they articulate their feelings is different. In 'Lesser Hippias', Socrates states, "you will do me a much greater benefit if you were to cure my soul of ignorance, than you would if you were to cure my body of disease."

Plato in his "The Republic", talks about Tripartite Soul that has a logical and reasoning mind, a spiritual mind that directs feelings and emotions and a mind that serves all appetites and desires. Only a healthy mind is able to maintain balance between the three. Personality of a person is reflected through over-reliance on any one part. Gail Salty, Professor of Psychiatry, remarked that mind is full of divergent thoughts and with mild-to-moderate illnesses of mind are capable of great creative works. Mania too is linked with creativity as, "when speed of thinking increases, word associations form more freely, as do flight of ideas, because the manic mind is less inclined to filtering details that, in a normal state, would be dismissed as irrelevant."

CONCLUSIONS

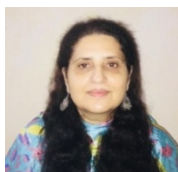
Mental marginalities have been emphasized upon in this paper. Today, even though there has been a great advancement in the field of medicine, a mental disorder is still considered as something to be ashamed about. Family, friends and society in general still need to come out of this fixation about mental problems. Several examples have been given as to what might be the cause of this problem. Human outlook has to become positive in order to do away negativity that prevails regarding "affected state of mind". Early Greeks allowed many patients to move around aimlessly as they were taken to be intellectuals. Socrates was a rational man, but this did not stop him from stating that he at times experienced "command hallucinations". Pythagoras too "heard voices". There were still many Greeks who believed that man goes berserk because

Gods are angry with him. At times, incurable patients who seemed to be possessed by the devil were put to death. Man continues to think and act in the same manner even in this century. Abuse in psychiatric institutions is highlighted in 'One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest.' Termed as American comedy-drama, Ken Kesey's novel explores serious issues, contemporary issues that need to be looked into and dealt with utmost seriousness. For its backdrop, the novel has America that is undergoing changes in Psychology and Psychiatry fields. It was time when Civil Rights Movement was halfway from the time of its inception and movement for **deinstitutionalization** was underway. Society is greatly responsible for "patients not getting well", this holds true when one comes across all that goes on at Oregon Psychiatric Hospital. The writer wrote about how man can be subtly coerced into unpleasant involuntary submission with the help of drugs and modern scientific technology with its dangerous techniques. Protagonist of the novel is lobotomized just because he had found about the black deeds of hospital authorities. He was fearless and lost his life. But the protagonist of Orwell's "1984" loses all hope of a free life because followers of totalitarianism prey upon his fear of rats. Literary language is deployed in a different manner in such novels to create a strong narrative. Writings come with aesthetic value that touches the heart and soul of the readers. World literature encompasses more than imagination; there is wealth of knowledge about history, society, religion, politics and economics etc. from where the literary piece originates. Reader can find solution to many things that disturb his peace of mind from literature that is steeped in culture of his place of birth. Often spiritual messages are put across through these works. Morals too find a way to get across to generations.

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